

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Updated January 23, 2014

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R42999

Summary

Recent international events have renewed congressional interest in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). UNESCO is a specialized agency of the U.N. system that promotes collaboration among its member countries in the fields of education, natural sciences, social and human sciences, culture, and communications and information. With an annual budget of approximately \$326 million, it supports nearly 2,000 staff members working at its headquarters in Paris and 65 field offices and institutes worldwide. UNESCO activities are funded through a combination of assessed contributions by member states to its regular budget, and voluntary contributions by member states and organizations.

U.S. Policy

The United States is a member of UNESCO and generally supports the organization's objectives. Over the years, however, some U.S. policy makers—particularly some Members of Congress—have expressed strong concern with UNESCO's politicization and, as some have alleged, lack of budget discipline and anti-democratic leanings. These concerns led to the United States' decision to withdraw from UNESCO in 1984. Since the United States rejoined the organization in 2003, Congress has demonstrated support for UNESCO—appropriating between \$73 million and \$84 million in assessed contributions per fiscal year, or about 22% of UNESCO's annual regular budget. It has maintained an ongoing interest in ensuring that UNESCO runs as efficiently and effectively as possible, and that its policies and programs are in line with U.S. priorities.

Palestinian Membership: U.S. Financial Withholding, FY2012–FY2014

Since late 2011, UNESCO has received significant U.S. and international attention resulting from member states' decision to admit "Palestine" as a member. The Obama Administration and many Members of Congress vehemently opposed this action, maintaining that Palestinian statehood can only be realized through direct negotiation between Israelis and Palestinians rather than through membership in U.N. entities. Subsequently, the United States withheld approximately \$80 million in FY2012 through FY2014 funding to UNESCO. Two laws enacted in the 1990s prohibit funding to U.N. entities that admit the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) as a member (P.L. 101-246), or grant full membership as a state to any organization or group that does not have the internationally recognized attributes of statehood (P.L. 103-236). The Obama Administration asked Congress to enact legislation to waive the aforementioned restrictions.

In November 2013, as a result of the financial withholding, the United States lost its vote in the UNESCO General Conference (GC), the organization's main decision-making body. The Obama Administration has emphasized that the United States remains a member of the organization and that it intends to "continue its engagement with UNESCO in every possible way."

Reform

Since UNESCO's establishment, member states have sought to improve the organization's effectiveness through reform. Many observers, including the United States, agree that UNESCO has successfully implemented various reforms, particularly during the time between the United States' decision to withdraw from the organization in 1984 and its return in 2003. At the same time, many experts argue that the organization needs additional reform. Weaknesses in UNESCO's structure and culture, they contend, hinder its ability to fulfill its mission.

A 2010 Independent External Evaluation report commissioned by member states recommends changing some of UNESCO's management processes, enhancing UNESCO's field presence, and strengthening the organization's governance mechanisms. Ultimately, the full impact of these and

other reform efforts is unclear. Their success—and the success of any future reforms—will likely depend on how effectively both UNESCO and its members follow through on implementation.

Issues for the 113th Congress

The recent controversy over Palestinian membership and loss of the United States' vote in the General Conference—coupled with broad concerns about spending levels in light of the recent economic downturn—have prompted some policy makers and observers to review the U.S. relationship with UNESCO. Examples of issues being considered are described below.

- **Effect on U.S. priorities.** Some experts and policy makers worry that the U.S. financial withholding and loss of voting rights in the GC have negatively impacted programs and activities that the United States views as priorities—including U.S. World Heritage sites, Holocaust education programs, tsunami early warning systems, and educational programs for women and girls.
- **The impact of the U.S. financial withholding on UNESCO's activities.** Many experts agree that the U.S. withholding has adversely affected the scope and effectiveness of UNESCO's programs. There are disagreements, however, regarding the extent of this impact. The long-term implications of the withholding remain to be seen and are largely dependent on how long the United States withholds funds and what fiscal actions, if any, UNESCO continues to take in response to the funding decrease.
- **The effectiveness of the U.S. withholding.** Some policy makers argue that the legislative restrictions prompting the U.S. withholding are no longer relevant or effective and should be waived. Others, however, contend that waiving the legislation would undermine U.S. credibility and provide a "green light" for Palestine to apply for membership in entities across the U.N. system.
- **UNESCO's role in U.S. foreign policy.** Some critics of UNESCO maintain that its activities do not reflect U.S. foreign policy interests. Supporters contend that the organization plays a key role in global issues that the United States views as strategic priorities, particularly education and science.
- **Challenges to UNESCO reform.** A significant obstacle to UNESCO reform is governments' differing views on the organization's role in the global multilateral framework. Moreover, each UNESCO member state has its own foreign policy priorities, political agenda, and perceptions of how the organization should work. These differences can lead to disagreements on budgeting, programming and, as most recently demonstrated, membership.

This report will be updated as events warrant.

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Introduction

During the past several decades, the United States has had a mixed relationship with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Most recently, decisions by some UNESCO member states have led to increased congressional interest in U.S. funding of and participation in the organization. Established in 1946 in the aftermath of World War II, UNESCO aims to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among member states in the fields of education, science, and culture. The organization, which has a specialized agency relationship with the United Nations, is headquartered in Paris, France, and composed of 195 member states. With an annual budget of about \$326 million, its programs and activities encompass a wide array of issues, including literacy, media and Internet freedom, ocean management, and environmental and cultural preservation, among others.

The United States played a key role in UNESCO's establishment and has generally supported the overall objectives of the organization. At the same time, U.S. policy makers—particularly some Members of Congress—have expressed concern with UNESCO's apparent politicization, lack of budget discipline, and perceived leanings toward anti-democratic countries. These concerns led to the United States' withdrawal from UNESCO in 1984. Since the United States rejoined the organization in 2003, Congress has demonstrated support for UNESCO—appropriating about \$618.6 million in regular budget contributions and \$9.5 million in voluntary contributions from FY2004 through FY2011.

In October 2011, UNESCO garnered significant attention from U.S. policy makers when a majority of member countries decided to admit “Palestine” as a member.¹ (The decision to pursue UNESCO membership was part of a broader, ongoing effort by Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to achieve membership or non-member observer state status in various U.N. bodies as a means for achieving recognition of Palestinian statehood.)² As a result of this decision, the United States withheld its contributions to UNESCO in accordance with two laws enacted in the 1990s that prohibit funding to U.N. entities that admit the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as a member (P.L. 101-246), or grant full membership as a state to any organization or group that does not have the internationally recognized attributes of statehood (P.L. 103-236). From FY2012 through FY2014, the United States withheld nearly \$80 million per year, or 22% of the UNESCO annual regular budget.

The Obama Administration actively opposes Palestinian membership in UNESCO. It argues that Palestinian statehood can only be realized through direct negotiation between Israel and the Palestinians, and not through membership in international organizations. At the same time, the Administration maintains that U.S. participation in UNESCO is in the interest of the United States and that the government should continue to fund and participate in the organization. In his FY2013 and FY2014 budget proposals, President Obama requested nearly \$80 million in assessed contributions for UNESCO, and stated that the Administration intended to work with Congress to “waive” the funding restrictions. In both FY2013 and FY2014, Congress did not enact a waiver. Critics argued that waiving the laws would undermine U.S. credibility and encourage the Palestinians to continue to pursue membership in other U.N. entities.

¹ This report refers to “Palestine” in the context of the U.N. system. U.N. General Assembly resolution 43/177, adopted December 15, 1988, states, “the designation ‘Palestine’ should be used in place of the designation ‘Palestine Liberation Organization’ in the United Nations system ...”

² In November 2012, the U.N. General Assembly decided to grant Palestine non-member state observer status by a vote of 138 in favor, 9 against (including the United States), and 41 abstaining. For more information, see the “Effectiveness and Reform” section.

As the debate over U.S. funding of and participation in UNESCO moves forward, Congress may consider a number of issues, including UNESCO's role, if any, in U.S. foreign policy, as well as the organization's overall effectiveness and reform efforts. It may also consider the long- and short-term implications, both positive and negative, of withholding funding to UNESCO. More broadly, policy makers might consider the efficacy of laws restricting funding for U.N. entities that admit Palestine as a member. A particularly pressing question moving forward is how, if at all, the United States will engage with UNESCO given its ongoing financial withholding and loss of voting rights in the General Conference.

Organization and Structure

UNESCO programs and activities encompass five sectors—education, natural sciences, social and human sciences, culture, and communication and information. The organization sponsors international exchanges and meetings in science, education, and other fields; promotes the free flow of ideas, including media freedom; encourages the conservation of books, monuments, and works of art; and assists member states in developing educational, scientific, and cultural programs. It also provides a mechanism for the drafting, adoption, and review of several international conventions and commissions, including the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (often referred to as the World Heritage Convention), the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), and the Convention against Discrimination in Education.⁴

More than 2,000 personnel from 170 countries work for UNESCO; approximately 850 staff work in the organization's 65 field offices and institutes worldwide.⁵ UNESCO's governing structure consists of three key mechanisms, described as follows.

- The **General Conference** (GC), composed of representatives from all member countries, is UNESCO's primary decision-making body. It meets every two years to determine the organization's policies, programs, and budget. With a few exceptions, GC decisions on important questions are made by consensus; consequently, approved resolutions are often not very specific, even those addressing budgetary issues.
- The **Executive Board**, composed of 58 member state representatives, meets twice a year and is responsible for implementing the program adopted by the GC.

Role in the U.N. System³

UNESCO is a specialized agency of the U.N. system. Articles 57 and 63 of the U.N. Charter state that specialized agencies are autonomous intergovernmental organizations "having wide international responsibilities [...] in economic, social, cultural, educational, health and related fields."

Like other specialized agencies, UNESCO has its own constitution, governance structure, budget, and programs. It regularly collaborates with the United Nations and other specialized agencies at the intergovernmental level through regular reporting to and interaction with the United Nations. Examples of other U.N. specialized agencies include the World Health Organization, International Labor Organization, and Food and Agriculture Organization.

³ The U.N. system consists of the entities or bodies established by the U.N. Charter, including the United Nations and its principal organs, subsidiary bodies, committees, and commissions; the separate international intergovernmental organizations considered specialized agencies by virtue of completing relationship agreements as provided for in Article 57 of the Charter; and a number of programs and funds established by the U.N. General Assembly under its authority derived from Article 22 of the Charter. For a complete list of the components of the U.N. System, see chart at http://www.un.org/en/aboutun/structure/org_chart.shtml.

⁴ For more information on UNESCO activities and programs, see <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/themes/>.

⁵ Examples of UNESCO institutes and centers include the Institute for Statistics and the International Bureau for Education. For a full list, see <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/about-us/where-we-are/institutes-and-centres/>.

Members are elected to the Board by the GC for a four-year term. The United States is currently a member of the Board; its term will expire in 2015.

- The **Director-General** (DG), currently Irina Bokova of Bulgaria, heads the UNESCO Secretariat. The DG is appointed to a four-year term by the GC on the recommendation of the Executive Board. She is charged with preparing the UNESCO program and budget, making proposals to the GC, creating the organizational structures of the Secretariat, and appointing staff. The DG can also play a key role in negotiations regarding budgets, resolutions, and programs.

The Executive Board and GC include various committees composed of member countries that consider issues related to the functioning of the organization or specific issues related to education, science, or culture.⁶

UNESCO maintains relationships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), foundations, the private sector, and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs). More than 350 NGOs and 20 foundations have an official relationship with UNESCO, and many more work with the organization on specific activities and programs at the local, national, and international level. UNESCO also works with several hundred private companies and organizations through traditional philanthropic and sponsorship relationships, as well as strategic partnerships developed through shared resources and expertise. In addition, it collaborates with more than 80 IGOs, including the European Union (EU) and various multilateral development banks, on specific programs and projects through formal agreements or ad hoc arrangements.⁷ UNESCO also partners and coordinates with other parts of the U.N. system through various system-wide coordination mechanisms and memoranda of understanding with other U.N. entities.⁸

UNESCO's relationships with other organizations are strengthened by National Commissions established by member governments in their respective countries. The commissions aim to provide links among UNESCO and NGOs, the private sector, local and national governments, and the public in each country. Commission members, who are appointed by governments, provide insight on UNESCO programs, and help implement training programs, studies, public awareness campaigns, and media outreach. There are currently 199 National Commissions worldwide, including one in the United States.⁹

⁶ The GC, for example, has a General Committee that steers the work of each GC session, as well as four other committees that address issues ranging from participant credentials to legal issues. The Executive Board's three committees include the Special Committee, which evaluates UNESCO activities; the Committee on Conventions and Recommendations, which considers the periodic reports of members on the implementation of UNESCO recommendations and conventions; and the Committee on NGOs, which promotes the input of NGOs on UNESCO's work. For more information on the CR Committee, see the "Effectiveness of Funding Restrictions" section.

⁷ For example, the UNESCO/NGO Collective Consultation on Higher Education, composed of about 60 NGOs representing all areas of the higher education community, acts as a think tank to assist UNESCO in the orientation and implementation of its higher education programs. In the private sector, UNESCO has worked with L'Oreal to improve the role of women in science, and Hewlett-Packard to alleviate "brain drain" in southeast Europe. It also works with IGOs such as the EU to address the teacher gaps in African countries, and the Inter-American Development Bank to develop World Heritage sites in Peru.

⁸ U.N. system-wide mechanisms promoting coordination include (1) the Chief Executives Board, a high-level coordination mechanism, chaired by the Secretary-General, designed to bring together 29 heads of U.N. entities to approve policy statements on behalf of the United Nations, and (2) the U.N. Development Group, composed of the 32 U.N. entities that address development.

⁹ The establishment of National Commissions is authorized under Article VII of the UNESCO constitution. For more information on the U.S. Commission, see the "U.S. Policy" section.

Funding and Budget

UNESCO activities are funded through a combination of assessed contributions by member states to the regular budget; voluntary contributions by member states, organizations, and others to special programs; and funds provided by partners such as other U.N. entities, NGOs, and the private sector. The U.S. share of UNESCO's regular budget is 22%, the largest among contributing members. Four countries—the United States, Japan (assessed at 15%), Germany (8%), and France (6%)—account for more than 50% of the assessed budget.

UNESCO's recent budget and cash flow have been significantly affected by member countries' October 2011 decision to admit Palestine as a member.¹⁰ As a result of Palestine's membership, the United States began to withhold its contributions to UNESCO in FY2012. Two laws enacted in the 1990s prohibit funding to U.N. entities that admit the PLO as a member (P.L. 101-246), or that grant full membership as a state to any organization or group that does not have the internationally recognized attributes of statehood (P.L. 103-236).¹¹

The UNESCO budget for 2010-2011 was \$653 million, or about \$326.5 million annually. The start of U.S. suspension of contributions, however, left UNESCO with immediate shortfall of \$72 million by the end of 2011. Funding for the 2012-2013 budget, which was originally \$653 million, was also affected by the U.S. withholding. It was decreased to \$465 million, or about \$232.5 annually—representing a \$188 million (or 29%) funding reduction. To cover these budget shortfalls, Director-General Bokova has introduced a number of initiatives and funding reductions, including:

- launching an Emergency Multi-Donor Fund for UNESCO Priority Programs and Reform Initiatives, which accepts financial contributions from countries, institutions, and individuals to cover the gaps left by U.S. withholdings (as of late 2013, the Fund had received \$75.1 million);¹²
- cutting staff mission travel costs by 73%, reducing consultant costs by 70%, and decreasing furniture and equipment costs by 64%; and
- abolishing over 40 staff posts (of the 1,854 staff posts funded under the regular budget, 311 remained vacant as of December 2012, the last date for which information is available).¹³

In a September 2013 address to the Executive Board, DG Bokova stated that because of the aforementioned actions, UNESCO has “sustained the impact of the financial crisis [of the U.S. withholding]” and “balanced the books.”¹⁴ At the same time, she argued that the new fiscal environment does not provide UNESCO with the resources to fulfill its broad mission. Bokova

¹⁰ See the “Effectiveness and Reform” section for more information on Palestinian membership.

¹¹ For more information on these laws, see the “U.S. Policy” section.

¹² For the first time, as a result of contributions to the Multi-Donor Fund, UNESCO received more voluntary contributions (\$391 million) than assessed contributions to the regular budget (\$352.9 million) in 2012. See *UNESCO Annual Report, 2012*, UNESCO, 2013, pp. 110-112.

¹³ Drawn from (1) “Facts and Figures: UNESCO's Response to the Financial Crisis,” UNESCO website, 2013; (2) “Financial Report & Audited Consolidated Financial Statements – 2012,” UNESCO, 2013; and (3) UNESCO document, 190 EX/34, *Financial Situation of the Organization and its Implications for the Implementation of the 36 C/5, Report by the Director-General on the Cashflow Situation of the Organization*, September 7, 2012.

¹⁴ “Address by Ms. Irina Bokova on the occasion of the opening of the 192nd session of the Executive Board,” UNESCO, September 30, 2013 (UNESCO document, DG/2013/142 Rev.).

has also stated that fundraising efforts such as the Multi-Donor Fund are not long-term solutions to the funding gaps.¹⁵

Effectiveness and Reform

Many U.S. policy makers generally support UNESCO's aim of promoting international collaboration in the fields of education, science, and communication. At the same time, some are concerned that the organization is not fulfilling its mission as efficiently or effectively as possible. This section describes concerns expressed by UNESCO critics, including some Members of Congress, regarding the organization's alleged politicization and organizational and cultural weaknesses. It also describes UNESCO's efforts to address some of these issues through internal evaluations and reform.

Politicization Concerns

One criticism that UNESCO faces, perhaps more than most U.N. specialized agencies, is politicization among its membership. Observers contend that in the General Conference and Executive Board, governments often focus on subjects unrelated to UNESCO's mission rather than issues such as education, science, or improving the organization's effectiveness. Most recently, some U.S. policy makers have raised questions and concerns regarding (1) UNESCO's decision to admit Palestine as a member, and (2) the composition of UNESCO's committees.

Palestinian Membership

In October 2011, UNESCO generated significant controversy both domestically and internationally when its General Conference adopted a resolution admitting Palestine as a member. (See **text box** for a chronology of Palestinian membership actions.) Some U.S. officials and observers viewed this as a political decision that reflected member states' long-standing and disproportionate focus on Israel within UNESCO and the U.N. system. Palestinian efforts to achieve UNESCO membership were part of broader efforts by PLO Chairman and Palestinian

"Palestine" and UNESCO Membership

Under the UNESCO Constitution, membership in the United Nations can qualify a state for membership in UNESCO. However, states that are not members of the United Nations—such as "Palestine"—may be admitted to UNESCO on the recommendation of the Executive Board, followed by a two-thirds majority vote in the General Conference.

Chronology

April 27, 1989—The PLO, following its 1988 declaration of Palestinian statehood, submitted a request to the Executive Board asking that it be admitted as a UNESCO member. Up to October 2011, the Board and the GC deferred consideration of the application and referred the agenda item to subsequent sessions of the Executive Board and GC.

October 5, 2011—The Executive Board, by a roll call vote of 40 in favor, 4 against, and 14 abstaining, decided to recommend that the General Conference admit Palestine as a UNESCO member.

October 31, 2011—The UNESCO GC, by a vote of 107 in favor, 14 against, and 52 abstaining, adopted a resolution admitting Palestine as a member.

November 23, 2011—Effective date of Palestinian membership in UNESCO per receipt of Palestine's notification of its signature and ratification of the UNESCO Constitution.

¹⁵ Steve Erlanger, "Cutoff of U.S. Money Leads UNESCO to Slash Programs and Seek Emergency Aid," *New York Times*, October 11, 2012.

Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to achieve international recognition for Palestinian statehood. On November 29, 2012, the U.N. General Assembly voted to change Palestine's observer status from "observer entity," to "non-member observer state" by a vote of 138 in favor, 9 against (including the United States), and 41 abstaining.¹⁶

Committee Composition

Some U.S. policy makers have raised concerns regarding the membership of UNESCO committees. Specifically, the Executive Board's Committee on Conventions and Recommendations (CR), which considers the periodic reports of members on the implementation of UNESCO recommendations and conventions, has been criticized by some governments, including the United States, for Syria's membership. Many are concerned that human rights abuses by the Syrian government impact the credibility of the CR committee, which is charged with, among other things, assessing countries' compliance with conventions that address human rights issues. In January 2012, the United States and other like-minded countries led an unsuccessful diplomatic effort to remove Syria from the committee. U.S. Permanent Ambassador to UNESCO David Killion stated, "We should not allow the Syrian regime to stand as a judge of other countries' human rights record while it systematically violates the human rights of its citizens."¹⁷ CR committee members, who are elected by and from within the Executive Board, serve two-year terms. Syria remains a member of the CR committee, and its term is set to expire in late 2014.

Organizational Culture and Priorities

Some experts contend that UNESCO's organizational structure and culture hinder its ability to fulfill its objectives. For example, many are concerned that UNESCO's hiring and promotion practices have little transparency and lack consistent implementation. Critics maintain that hiring practices appear to favor geographic representation and gender balance with too little consideration of merit. They emphasize that issues such as employee progress and managerial accountability should be addressed to "avoid [staff] frustration" that may affect UNESCO's effectiveness.¹⁸ In addition, critics assert that UNESCO's governance structure is "unwieldy," with weeks-long meetings that encourage long debates focused on administrative rather than substantive matters and time-consuming reporting requirements for Secretariat staff.¹⁹ Some have also expressed concern with what has been called an "inward-oriented" and risk-averse culture, as well as lack of collaboration and communication within and among UNESCO sectors.²⁰

¹⁶ This change in observer status is a largely symbolic act. Although Palestine has the term "state" in its current designation, it is not a member of the United Nations. As such, it does not have the right to vote or call for a vote in the General Assembly. Palestine has maintained many of the capacities it had as an observer entity—including participation in Assembly debates and the ability to co-sponsor draft resolutions and decisions related to proceedings on Palestinian and Middle East issues. For more information, see CRS Report RL34074, *The Palestinians: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Jim Zanotti.

¹⁷ U.S. Mission to UNESCO Press Release, "Statement on Syria and the CRR," January 2012.

¹⁸ UNESCO document, 190 EX/22, *Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the Management and Administration of UNESCO*, August 13, 2012.

¹⁹ Nicholas Burnett, "UNESCO Education: Political or Technical? Reflections on Recent Personal Experience," *International Journal of Educational Development*, Vol. 31, 2011, pp. 315-318.

²⁰ Aaron Benavot, "Imagining a Transformed UNESCO with Learning at its Core," *International Journal of Educational Development*, Vol. 31, 2011, pp. 558-561.

Additionally, a number of experts have emphasized the apparent imbalance between UNESCO's administrative and programmatic costs. For example, prior to the adjustment for the U.S. financial withholding, the 2012-2013 biennium budget was \$653 million (about \$327 million per year); \$57.7 million (about 17%) of that yearly budget was allocated for the education sector, with staff costs accounting for nearly \$32 million, leaving about \$25 million for actual education activities and programs.²¹ This problem has been exacerbated over the years as UNESCO's real budget has decreased but staffing costs have increased, which has reduced available funding for UNESCO programs.²²

2010 Independent External Evaluation Report Findings

Some of the aforementioned concerns were reflected in an August 2010 UNESCO Independent External Evaluation (IEE) report commissioned by the Executive Board and GC.²³ The report found that while UNESCO is valued and its achievements are recognized by many, the organization is "unevenly" meeting its mandate. Evaluators noted that the organization's broad mission is "permissive," meaning that UNESCO could claim to play a role in any worldwide issue—leading to instances of programmatic incoherence and general lack of focus. Moreover, while UNESCO has sought to concentrate or improve the focus in larger program areas and across sectors, these efforts have been undermined by "weak incentives for collaboration, sectoral budget systems, too many priorities and cross-cutting objectives, and lack of consensus in governing bodies and in the [UNESCO] Secretariat."²⁴

Another issue raised in the IEE report was the effectiveness of UNESCO's field presence. The report stated that UNESCO field offices are "over-extended, often under-resourced, and poorly staffed," and that they might benefit from "a smaller number of more capable and well-resourced multi-skilled ... regional and subregional bureaus."²⁵ In addition, the report highlighted the challenge of measuring the effectiveness of UNESCO activities, noting that evidence of UNESCO's impact tends to be largely anecdotal. It found that while UNESCO has invested in results-based management, the "evaluation culture" in the organization is weak, noting that recommendations stemming from evaluations and assessment were not fully implemented. At the same time, the report acknowledged that the broad and often intangible nature of UNESCO's mission makes it difficult to measure the organization's impact. It also emphasizes that evaluations and assessments may be complex and costly.

To address these and other issues, the report recommended five broad "strategic directions" for UNESCO:

- *Focus*—improving the organization's focus to address challenges consistent with its mandate;

²¹ This does not include extrabudgetary funding, which often supports a range of education programs earmarked by donors.

²² UNESCO document, 36 C/5, *Approved Programme and Budget 2012-2013*.

²³ See UNESCO documents, 182 EX/Decision 24 and 35 C/Resolution 102. The evaluation was undertaken by a cross-regional 11-person team between January and July 2010.

²⁴ The evaluators further note that examples of successful collaboration are often the result of "informal efforts by committed individuals over institutional barriers to cooperation." UNESCO document, 185 EX/18, *Report on the Independent External Evaluation of UNESCO, Summary*, August 30, 2010.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

- *Field*—positioning UNESCO closer to the field to be closer to country needs, resources, and partners;
- *United Nations*—strengthening participation in the U.N. system;
- *Governance*—strengthening governance mechanisms; and
- *Partnership*—developing a partnership strategy that improves its relationship with civil society and the private sector.

Recent Reform Activities

Over the years, UNESCO member states have sought to improve the organization's effectiveness through a range of reform efforts.²⁶ Many observers, including some in the United States, agree that UNESCO has successfully implemented various reforms, particularly during the time between the United States' decision to withdraw from the organization in 1984 and its return in 2003.²⁷ Nevertheless, many experts and policy makers in the international community and the United States maintain that additional changes are needed to ensure that UNESCO is successful in achieving its mission.

The most recent wave of reform activities is driven in part by the strategic directions recommended in the aforementioned Independent External Evaluation report.²⁸ After the report was published, the Executive Board and GC agreed to 87 "action points," which are in various states of implementation.²⁹ UNESCO reports that as of September 2013, 70 of 87 points were completed.³⁰ Completed activities include adjusting the scope, actions, and expected results in future budgeting and programming cycles; reviewing UNESCO's partnership agreements with other U.N. entities and identifying areas for future collaboration; and implementing the first phase of a decentralization strategy that works to reform field networks in Africa and Arab states by clarifying the roles, responsibilities, and functions of various UNESCO field offices.³¹

Separate from IEE-related reforms, member states agreed to a human resources management strategy for 2011 through 2016 that focuses on

²⁶ For more information on broader U.N. reform efforts, see CRS Report RL33848, *United Nations Reform: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Luisa Blanchfield.

²⁷ In that period, UNESCO adopted a policy of "zero-budget growth," reduced staff levels, decentralized some staff and program operations to the field, increased its focus on education programs, and established an Internal Oversight Service (IOS), which conducts internal audits, evaluations, and investigations. For more information on reforms, see GAO report 03-565R, *Status of Reforms and Budgets of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization*, March 28, 2003; and Karen Mundy, "Educational Multilateralism in a Changing World Order: UNESCO and the Limits of the Possible," *International Journal of Educational Development*, Vol. 19, 1999, pp. 27-52.

²⁸ For a list of reforms undertaken prior to the publication of the IEE report, see UNESCO document, 186 EX/17, Part II, *Report by the Director General on the Follow-up With Respect to Operational Aspects of the IEE Report*, April 18, 2011, pp. 2-3. For information on UNESCO reform efforts, particularly related to transparency and accountability, see the UNESCO response to the U.S. Mission to the United Nations U.N. Transparency and Accountability Initiative (UNTAI II), February 2013, available at http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/BPI/EPA/images/media_services/Director-General/UNTAI-II_Consolidated-response_Feb2013.pdf.

²⁹ See UNESCO documents, 187 EX/Decision 17, and 36/C Resolution 104.

³⁰ "Address by Ms. Irina Bokova on the occasion of the opening of the 192nd session of the Executive Board," UNESCO, September 30, 2013.

³¹ A full list of the 87 action points is available in UNESCO document, 187 EX/17 Part I, *Follow-up to the IEE of UNESCO, Report by the Director-General on Progress in Implementation and Monitoring by the Executive Board System*, September 2, 2011.

- improving talent management (attracting and retaining talented people committed to the values of the organization);
- enhancing staff capacity (developing efficient and effective staff capabilities); and
- creating an enabling work environment (by providing the necessary internal conditions to support staff commitment and motivation).³²

UNESCO also continues to participate in broader U.N. reform-related efforts, including system-wide coherence efforts such as the “Delivering as One” pilot initiative established in eight countries in 2006 to improve coordination and cooperation among U.N. Country Team members.

The full impact of these recent reform efforts is still unclear. Their overall success—and the success of any future reform efforts—will largely depend on how effectively both UNESCO and its member countries follow through on implementation.³³

U.S. Policy

The United States was one of the original members of UNESCO and has generally supported the organization’s overall objectives.³⁴ At the same time, U.S. policy makers, including some Members of Congress, have been critical of the organization, leading to the United States’ nearly 20-year withdrawal in 1984, followed by its subsequent decision to rejoin in 2003. (See **text box** for more details.)

U.S. Withdrawal: 1984-2003

In December 1983, the Secretary of State notified then-Director-General of UNESCO, Amadou-Mahter M’Bow of Senegal, that the United States would be terminating its membership in the organization, effective in December 1984. Three key concerns influenced the U.S. decision. The first was UNESCO’s apparent politicization, which included GC actions that (1) targeted Israel, and (2) shifted the definition of human rights from the western concept of individual rights to that of “collective peoples’ rights.” The second concern was the organization’s hostility toward the basic institutions of a free society through its support of activities in international communications, which many western countries viewed as a threat to freedom of the press. Finally, many were concerned with UNESCO’s lack of adherence to the U.S.-proposed “zero net program growth” for all international entities, as well as with apparent mismanagement problems and high overhead costs under DG M’Bow. In September 2002, President George W. Bush, in a speech before the U.N. General Assembly, announced that the United States would rejoin UNESCO. The President stated that the organization had been reformed and that the United States would “participate fully in UNESCO’s mission to advance human rights, tolerance, and learning.”³⁵ The United States officially rejoined in October 2003.

The United States engages with UNESCO through the U.S. Mission to UNESCO, which is located in Paris, France, and headed by a U.S. Permanent Representative. Mission staff, along with temporary staff from U.S. agencies and departments, work with other national delegations and subject-area experts to further U.S. policy priorities in UNESCO.³⁶ Such priorities include

³² For more information on the strategy, see UNESCO document, 186 EX/25, April 18, 2011, *Report by the Director-General on the Human Resources Management Strategy*.

³³ For a discussion of challenges facing UNESCO reform efforts, see the “Issues for Congress” section.

³⁴ U.S. participation in UNESCO is established under P.L. 79-565, which authorized annual appropriations to the organization, and directed the President to set up a U.S. National Commission for UNESCO. Between 1946 and 1984, the United States contributed nearly \$458 million to UNESCO in assessed contributions.

³⁵ Statement by President George W. Bush, 57th U.N. General Assembly, September 12, 2002.

³⁶ The Mission supports seven direct-hire positions (composed of foreign and civil service), as well as five local staff

combating illiteracy, improving water resource management, monitoring climate change, enhancing tsunami early warning systems, preserving world heritage sites, and promoting free media worldwide.³⁷ The United States also engages with and supports the U.S. National Commission to UNESCO, which includes experts from non-governmental, federal, state, and local government sectors.³⁸

Response to Palestinian Membership

The United States is currently withholding its voluntary and assessed contributions to UNESCO as a result of the General Conference's October 2011 decision to admit Palestine as a member. As previously mentioned, two provisions in U.S. law prohibit funding to U.N. entities that admit the PLO as a member or grant full membership as a state to any organization or group that does not have the internationally recognized attributes of statehood:³⁹

- **Section 410 of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1994 and 1995 (P.L. 103-236)** states that the United States shall not make contributions to “any affiliated organization of the United Nations which grants full membership as a state to any organization or group that does not have the internationally recognized attributes of statehood”; and
- **Section 414 of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991 (P.L. 101-246)** states, “No funds authorized to be appropriated by this Act or any other Act shall be available for the United Nations or any specialized agencies thereof which accords the Palestine Liberation Organization the same standing as member states.”

The United States voted against the Executive Board and GC actions that led to Palestine's admission as a UNESCO member. Obama Administration officials stated that the GC's decision was “regrettable and premature,” and emphasized that the United States “remains steadfast in its support for the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state.... [S]uch a state can only be realized through direct negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians.”⁴⁰ At the same time, officials expressed deep commitment to the organization and pledged to find ways to support and strengthen its work. The State Department reports that since the U.S. withholding, the U.S. Mission to UNESCO has shifted its focus toward emphasizing the value of U.S. engagement in the organization and maintaining U.S. influence.⁴¹

members. Agencies involved in UNESCO activities include the National Park Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the Army Corps of Engineers.

³⁷ Examples of specific projects include those addressing Holocaust education; promoting literacy and education programs for women and girls; researching seismic activities and earthquake engineering; supporting trade and vocational schools in Afghanistan; preserving traditional music of the world; and promoting open access to global maps, among others. These projects were funded primarily through voluntary contributions to UNESCO.

³⁸ The commission is composed of 50 NGO representatives, seven federal government officials, nine state and local officials, and 15 at-large individuals. More information is available at <http://www.state.gov/p/io/unesco/index.htm>.

³⁹ The provisions are codified as notes to 22 U.S.C. 287e.

⁴⁰ U.S. Statement in Explanation of Vote on Draft Resolution 9.1 Regarding Membership for Palestine in UNESCO, delivered by U.S. Permanent Representative to UNESCO, Ambassador David T. Killian, October 31, 2011.

⁴¹ “Office of Inspections, Inspection of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, Paris, France,” Department of State Office of the Inspector General, Report ISP-I-12-26, May 2012.

In November 2013, the United States lost its vote in the UNESCO General Conference (GC) under Article IV of the organization's constitution.⁴² Article IV states that a member state shall have no vote in the GC if the total amount of contributions due exceeds the total amount of contributions payable by it for the current year and the immediately preceding calendar year. The United States owed assessments for two consecutive calendar years (2011 and 2012) in late 2013, and thus was deemed ineligible to vote in the GC.

In statements made after the United States lost its vote, Obama Administration officials emphasized that the United States would remain a member of the UNESCO. They recognized the organization as a "critical partner," and noted that the United States intends to "continue its engagement with UNESCO in every possible way."⁴³ The Administration further emphasized that the United States would attend meetings, participate in debates, and maintain its seat on, and vote as an elected member of, the UNESCO Executive Board.⁴⁴

U.S. Contributions, FY2004-FY2014

As a member of UNESCO, the United States is assessed to pay 22% of the UNESCO regular budget, or roughly \$80 million a year. This contribution is financed from the Contributions to International Organizations (CIO) appropriations account. The United States has also made voluntary contributions to selected UNESCO programs—particularly the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) and World Heritage Fund—through the International Organizations and Programs (IO&P) account.⁴⁵ (Both the accounts are typically funded through the Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Appropriations Act.)

Table I. U.S. Contributions to UNESCO: FY2004-FY2014

(in millions of current U.S. dollars)

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Assessed (CIO)	84.14	76.75	70.92	73.48	77.62	75.94	80.92	78.83	0.00 ^a	0.00	0.00
Voluntary (IO&P)	1.89	0.84	0.99	0.99	0.99	1.00	1.00	1.85	0.00	0.00	0.00

Source: CRS calculations, Department of State congressional budget justifications, annual appropriations legislation.

Notes: CIO = Contributions to International Organizations account, IO&P = International Organizations and Programs account.

- a. As a result of the financial withholding, the United States paid nothing towards calendar year (CY) 2011 assessments to UNESCO (about \$79 million depending on the exchange rates), which would have been paid from FY2012 CIO funds.

⁴² Israel also lost its vote in the GC in November 2013 under Article IV of the UNESCO constitution.

⁴³ See (1) U.S. National Statement by Ambassador David Killion, 37th General Conference, Paris, France, November 8, 2013, and (2) Press Statement by Jen Psaki, U.S. Department of State, "Loss of Vote at UNESCO," November 8, 2013.

⁴⁴ The United States is a member of various UNESCO governing mechanisms, including the Executive Board; the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) Executive Council, and the International Hydrological Program (IHP) Intergovernmental Council.

⁴⁵ Although the United States was not a member of UNESCO between 1984 and 2003, it continued to provide voluntary funding to the organization through the IO&P account.

As demonstrated in **Table 1**, from FY2004 to FY2011, U.S. assessed contributions to UNESCO ranged between \$70 million and \$84 million per year. Voluntary contributions fluctuated between \$840,000 and \$1.89 million during the same time period. The United States withheld funding to UNESCO from FY2012 through FY2014. In both FY2013 and FY2014, the President requested nearly \$80 million in UNESCO assessed contributions through the CIO account, and \$880,000 in UNESCO International Contributions for Scientific, Educational, and Cultural Activities (ICSECA) voluntary funds through the IO&P account.⁴⁶ The President also asked Congress to support legislation that would provide authority to waive the legislative restrictions.⁴⁷ To waive or modify such restrictions, Congress could (1) enact stand-alone legislation or (2) amend the existing restrictions. To date, Congress has not enacted a waiver.⁴⁸

Issues for Congress

The controversy over Palestinian membership and the broader political climate of fiscal austerity may prompt some policy makers to take stock of U.S. participation in and funding of UNESCO. This section discusses selected issues that the 113th Congress may wish to consider.

Effect of Withholding on U.S. Priorities

An area of ongoing concern among some U.S. policy makers is the impact that the U.S. withholding and loss of voting rights in the GC may have on U.S. influence within UNESCO. Specifically, many are concerned that the loss of a U.S. vote in the GC will hinder the United States' ability to shape internal UNESCO management and policies. For example, the United States cannot cast a vote for the Director-General or members of UNESCO subsidiary bodies. It also cannot vote for or against various budget proposals considered by the GC.

Some also worry that the financial withholding has negatively impacted activities that the United States views as priorities—including Holocaust education programs, tsunami early warning systems, educational programs for women and girls, World Heritage sites (see **text box** on next page), and various training and literacy programs in the Middle East. In response, some analysts have noted that UNESCO activities widely viewed as U.S. priorities are funded primarily through voluntary contributions from countries other than the United States. (Literacy programs for

⁴⁶ For FY2012, the President requested \$78.245 in assessed contributions and \$980,000 in voluntary contributions. In FY2013 and FY2014, he requested \$78.968 and \$77.764, respectively, in assessed contributions. U.S. funding to UNESCO was not provided in FY2012 because the United States' calendar year assessment is typically paid by funds from the following fiscal year (e.g., the CY2012 assessment is covered by FY2013 U.S. funding). The United States' CY2012 assessment, which would have been covered by FY2013 contributions, was estimated at about \$79 million.

⁴⁷ The Administration's proposed legislative language for the waiver in FY2014 is on p. 29 of the Congressional Budget Justification, Vol. 2., Foreign Operations, FY2014, Department of State: "(p) *SPECIALIZED AGENCY WAIVERS.—The President may waive section 414 of P.L. 101-246 and section 410 of P.L. 103-236 on a case-by-case basis, if the President determines and certifies in writing to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, and the Committees on Appropriations that to do so is important to the national interests of the United States.*" If Congress had enacted such a waiver, the Administration requested an additional \$38.883 million for "FY2012, FY2013, and FY2014 contingent requirements" funding that would cover U.S. arrears accrued in FY2012 and FY2013.

⁴⁸ Most recently, the explanatory statement to the Consolidated Appropriations Act, FY2014 (P.L. 113-76; January 17, 2014) states that the bill "does not include funds for an assessed contribution to ...[UNESCO]... which is prohibited due to the application of P.L. 101-246 and P.L. 103-236." (See Congressional Record, Vol. 160, p. H1162, January 15, 2014.)

Afghan soldiers, for example, are funded by voluntary contributions from Japan.)⁴⁹ At the same time, UNESCO supporters emphasize that many of the programs funded by voluntary contributions are managed by entities financed through the UNESCO regular budget. (The literacy program in Afghanistan, for instance, is financed through the Afghanistan Field Office and the International Bureau of Education, both of which are funded through the regular budget.)

Impact of Withholding on UNESCO Programs and Activities

U.S. and international policy makers generally agree that the U.S. withholding has negatively affected the scope and effectiveness of UNESCO's programs and activities. There are disagreements, however, regarding the extent of this impact. For example, some officials and experts, including UNESCO DG Irina Bokova, argue that the funding cut has had a crippling effect on existing activities and impeded the organization's ability to fulfill its mandate.⁵⁰ At the same time, some experts note that during the U.S. withdrawal between 1984 and 2003, UNESCO was able to fulfill its mission and implement many of its activities without U.S. financial support.⁵¹ Ultimately, the long-term impact of the U.S. withholding on UNESCO activities remains to be seen, and may depend on

- the fiscal or organizational actions, if any, UNESCO continues to take in response to the sudden funding decrease (for example, further adjustments to the organization's budget and programming in both the short and long-term by the Executive Board, GC, and/or DG);
- the extent to which UNESCO can continue to solicit extrabudgetary contributions from other countries, other international organizations, or the private sector, to cover any budget shortfalls; or
- when, if at all, the United States resumes financial contributions to UNESCO (for example, if the United States withholds UNESCO funding for 4 years, the impact would be far less than if it were to withhold contributions for 10 years).

UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the United States

Background. During the past two decades, some Members of Congress have demonstrated an interest in U.S. participation in the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (known as the World Heritage Convention). Under the Convention, countries agree to protect and preserve natural and cultural sites of exceptional ecological, scientific, or cultural importance through the World Heritage List. Congressional perspectives on the Convention have varied. Some Members of Congress have supported the Convention, while others have expressed concern that UNESCO designation of World Heritage sites in the United States infringes on national sovereignty. Ultimately, however, U.S. participation in the Convention does not give the United Nations authority over U.S. World Heritage sites or related land-management decisions. There are currently 21 World Heritage Sites in the United States, including the Statue of Liberty, Grand Canyon, and Everglades National Park.⁵²

Pending U.S. World Heritage Site Nominations. Some Members of Congress are concerned about the possible impact of the U.S. withholding (and subsequent loss of a vote in the GC) on several U.S. World Heritage

⁴⁹ The Heritage Foundation Issue Brief #3760, "The United States Should Withdraw from UNESCO," by Brett Schaefer, October 19, 2012.

⁵⁰ John Irish, "UNESCO Chief Says Funding Cuts 'Crippling' the Organization," *Reuters*, October 12, 2012, and Steven Erlanger, "Cutoff of U.S. Money Leads UNESCO to Slash Programs and Seek Emergency Aid," *New York Times*, October 11, 2012.

⁵¹ For a discussion of steps UNESCO has taken to reduce costs in light of the U.S. financial withholding, see the "Funding and Budget" section.

⁵² For a full list of U.S. World Heritage sites, see <http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/US/>.

sites currently being considered for inscription on the World Heritage List (the List). In June 2014, for example, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee is expected to consider Poverty Point State Historic Site and National Monument in West Carroll Parish, Louisiana, for inclusion on the List.⁵³ At this point, it is unclear whether the U.S. withholding will impact the inscription of U.S. sites. In an effort to address this issue, some Members of Congress introduced legislation that would fund the World Heritage Program. In July 2013, for example, the Senate Committee on Appropriations adopted an amendment, by a vote of 19-11, which stated that funds appropriated for “international contributions for scientific, educational, and cultural activities may be available only to the World Heritage Fund.” The amendment was not included in FY2014 foreign operations appropriations legislation (Division J of P.L. 113-76).

Effectiveness of Funding Restrictions

The U.S. financial withholding from UNESCO has raised broader issues about the effectiveness of the legislative restrictions that prohibit U.S. contributions to U.N. entities that admit Palestine as a member. In a March 2012 hearing before a House appropriations subcommittee, for example, then-U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Susan Rice questioned whether the 20-year-old restrictions are still relevant in 2012. Specifically, she stated that the Israeli-Palestinian peace process has changed significantly since the 1990s. Rice emphasized that the original legislation was meant to serve as a deterrent and that, given Palestine’s recent admission to UNESCO, it no longer serves this function. She argued that rather than withdrawing from UNESCO, which may jeopardize U.S. interests and priorities, the United States should continue to fund the organization and work from within to persuade other member states to reverse the decision to admit Palestine.⁵⁴

Conversely, some policy makers argue that the U.S. withholding deters Palestinian membership efforts and U.N. member states who might consider voting in favor of Palestine’s membership. They argue that if the United States were to modify the legislative restrictions to allow for UNESCO funding, it would undermine U.S. credibility and provide a “green light” for Palestine to apply for membership in entities across the U.N. system. Some might suggest that the General Assembly’s November 2012 decision to change Palestine’s observer status weakens this argument. Alternatively, some experts argue that the legislation has played a role in preventing Palestine from achieving U.N. membership.

Role of UNESCO in U.S. Foreign Policy

The role of UNESCO, and multilateralism as a whole, in U.S. foreign policy is one of the underlying issues facing policy makers as they consider U.S. funding of and participation in the organization. In addition to concerns regarding Palestinian membership, some critics of UNESCO maintain that its activities do not reflect U.S. foreign policy interests. Specifically, they suggest that the United States should devote its resources to bilateral projects that are more in line with U.S. priorities. They emphasize that the United States regularly contributed nearly one-quarter of the UNESCO budget, yet has only one vote in the General Conference and therefore little influence over how U.S. funds are spent. Some critics are also frustrated by UNESCO’s history of perceived anti-American leanings and disproportionate focus on Israel. Moreover, as international organizations and development agencies increase their activities in the educational, scientific, and cultural fields, some U.S. policy makers have questioned whether UNESCO is the most effective

⁵³ In the summer of 2015, the Committee will likely consider the inscription of the San Antonio Missions in Texas, which includes most of San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, as well as the Alamo.

⁵⁴ Drawn from “Testimony of Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations,” House Subcommittee on Appropriations for State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, March 20, 2012.

organization for addressing these issues. They suggest that to stay competitive in the changing multilateral landscape, UNESCO should reevaluate its mission and the scope of its activities to ensure its relevance.

Supporters of UNESCO maintain that the organization plays a key role in global issues that the United States views as strategic priorities, particularly education, science, cultural heritage, and media freedom. They contend that U.S. participation in and funding of UNESCO allows the United States to influence the organization's budget and activities, as well as pursue U.S. foreign policy objectives in key geographic regions such as the Middle East. Moreover, they emphasize that U.S. participation allows the government to share costs and resources with other governments and organizations. Some experts suggest that if the United States does not participate in or fund UNESCO, it leaves the door open for other countries to influence the scope and direction of UNESCO programs. Many of these other donor countries, some argue, may not share the same values or foreign policy priorities of the United States. Proponents further contend that UNESCO's convening power and perceived neutrality (particularly among developing countries) enhances its effectiveness and credibility, allowing it to undertake global challenges the United States could not address on its own, including coordinating global tsunami early warning systems and protecting World Heritage sites.

Challenges to Reform

UNESCO faces multiple challenges as it seeks to implement substantive organizational reform. A key obstacle is governments' differing perspectives on UNESCO's role in the global multilateral framework. Each country has its own foreign policy priorities, political agenda, and perceptions of how the organization should work. Such differences sometimes lead to fundamental disagreements on budgeting, programming, and, as most recently demonstrated, membership. Some experts contend that these disparate perspectives dilute UNESCO's already broad organizational mandate. For example, the GC and Executive Board often approve new themes, activities, and programs for UNESCO headquarters to implement; however, no additional resources are allocated to implement such activities, and many contend that they are not sufficiently prioritized. Moreover, existing programs widely viewed as weak or incoherent are often not eliminated. This occurs not only across UNESCO, but also within individual sectors, in some cases leading to program duplication.

Compounding this dynamic is the sometimes tenuous relationship between developing and developed countries in UNESCO fora. Each country has one vote in the GC and Executive Board, meaning that developing countries, represented primarily by the Group of 77 (G-77),⁵⁵ often have the votes to advance their agendas, which some critics argue can be highly politicized. At the same time, developed countries, including the United States, provide the majority of UNESCO funding, yet do not have a proportionate voice in determining the organization's budget or programs. These countries may seek to influence UNESCO activities by allocating extrabudgetary funding for specific programs. They may also turn to other international organizations to address their educational, scientific, or cultural priorities, which some experts argue may undermine UNESCO's authority and effectiveness, drawing much needed resources away from the organization. Many observers have noted that compared to other IOs such as the World Bank, UNESCO no longer has the comparative advantage in the education sector. A recent assessment by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), for

⁵⁵ The G-77 is a group of 133 member countries that aim to articulate and promote their collective economic interests and enhance their joint negotiating capacity in international fora such as the United Nations.

example, found that “UNESCO’s poor leadership in education in the past has meant that leadership is often assumed by others.”⁵⁶

Many observers and policy makers, including some in the United States, have argued that the U.S. decision to withhold funding from UNESCO may spur the organization to implement further substantive reform. Specifically, they contend that the budget shortfall has created an opportunity for member states to improve the organization’s overall efficiency and effectiveness by reevaluating UNESCO priorities and streamlining its activities. Some critics, however, suggest that the U.S. withholding has had minimal impact on reform efforts. In their view, UNESCO’s primary response to the withholding has been to create new funding streams through various emergency funds rather than implement substantive change.

Looking Ahead

The current and future role of UNESCO as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy remains unclear, and any number of events may influence U.S. actions toward the organization. Prospects for U.S. funding of UNESCO might be viewed in the broader context of fiscal austerity debates. Specifically, some policy makers might be less likely to pursue or advocate U.S. funding of or participation in UNESCO in the current economic climate. The level and extent of UNESCO’s response to the U.S. withholding may also influence U.S. policy toward the organization. If UNESCO were to implement substantive reform, streamline its budget and programs, or rescind Palestine’s membership, lawmakers might be more likely to consider restoring U.S. funding for the organization.

One of the foremost issues policy makers may face is how, if at all, the United States will engage with the organization given the ongoing financial withholding and loss of a vote in the General Conference. The United States remains a member of the Executive Board; however, its term will expire in 2015. Many policy makers worry that the United States will lose its influence in the organization while continuing to accumulate arrearages. Some observers have suggested that the United States withdraw from the organization as it did in 1984, while others—including the Obama Administration—maintain that the United States should remain engaged with the organization to the extent that it can.

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Acknowledgments

Research Associates Tameisha Henry and Elan Mitchell assisted with research for this report.

⁵⁶ Multilateral Aid Review: Assessment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), DFID, November 2011, at <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/mar/unesco.pdf>. UNESCO’s response to the review, dated April 2, 2013, is available at http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/BPI/EPA/images/media_services/Director-General/DFID-MAR-EN.pdf.

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